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Johannes Botes

University of Baltimore, jbotes@ubmail.ubalt.edu

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Keywords: *conflict resolution, Israel, media moderator, news anchors, moderators, Nightline (ABC-TV), public affairs news programming (TV), South Africa, television debates*

Author Bio(s)

Johannes (Jannie) Botes is an Assistant Professor in the Negotiation and Conflict Management Masters Program at the University of Baltimore (UB). His main areas of academic interest are communication and conflict, conflict transformation, informal third party roles, and conflict resolution in Africa. Before joining UB he was a visiting professor at Bryn Mawr College (1997-1998) and at the George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (1998-1999), from which he holds a Ph.D. He obtained his Masters' degree in Communication from the American University. He was formerly a radio and television journalist in South Africa where he received various awards for his work.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS TELEVISION AND THIRD PARTY ROLES: THE *NIGHTLINE* DEBATES IN SOUTH AFRICA (1985) AND ISRAEL (1988)

Johannes (Jannie) Botes

Abstract

This paper examines the strategies, tactics and tasks of a media moderator during television debates regarding deep-rooted conflicts, as well as the overall intended and unintended roles and effects of these broadcasts. Two case studies—the Nightline (ABC-TV) broadcasts from South Africa (1985) and Israel (1988)—are examined by comparing the actions of a public affairs television moderator to conventional third party intervenors, as defined in conflict resolution literature. In the process the paper presents research regarding the manifest tactics and latent roles demonstrated by a television moderator and the manner in which these activities can be compared to the tasks of conventional third parties such as mediators. The paper finally also reflects on how television debates can become problem-solving dialogues that assist in transforming deep-rooted conflicts.

Introduction

Despite all the support for the proposition that the news media do not and cannot operate as effective third parties, I would argue that they can and do (Arno, 1984, p. 233).

This article will focus specifically on television public affairs news programming: news anchors and moderators who, similar to conventional mediators, purposefully bring parties in conflict together, either physically in a television studio, or ‘unite’ them electronically for discussion and debate. The research¹ is based on the ABC-TV program, *Nightline*, which brought conflicting parties within Israel and South Africa together on television for the first time, in South Africa in 1985 and in Israel in 1988. *Nightline's* regular interviewing format as well as the program's larger ‘town meeting’ design for discussion, which includes audiences, formed the basis of a comparative case analysis comparing the roles, actions, and interventions of television anchors and producers, to that of the roles and functions of conflict intervenors as described in conflict resolution literature. The notion that media forums do more than just establish contact between opposing parties, but that they apparently have a third-party role in creating conditions for the resolution of conflict, raises the question of how and where to test such a hypothesis. Arno (1984) proposes a form of media analysis that is parallel to methods of analysis in third-party intervention. This, of course, inherently assumes a comparison between media and conventional third party intervention roles that is at the heart of this paper.

Media Roles in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Is one of the roles of the news media, and especially of television, to become public forums where disputants of all kinds can discuss or “negotiate” their differences? Both Loshitzky (1991) and O’Heffernan (1991) have identified “on-air negotiations” on public affairs television formats such as *Nightline*, as a role for the media. Loshitzky notes that television, and especially the town meeting format “serves as an implicit, yet reflexive comment about the presumably superior skills of television over reality to solve conflicts and to engage adversaries in a productive process of negotiation” (1991, p. 564).

In general, however, there is lack of consensus about what exactly media roles are or ought to be, let alone how they pertain to social conflict and its resolution in particular. This problem has led media theorists such as Merrill (1990) to exclaim that nobody, not even journalists, seem to know what media roles are supposed to be (see also Katz, 1989). In spite of this there is a recurring theme in the discussion about media roles: the choice between neutral and observer roles versus active and participant roles (McQuail, 1990). To define themselves as simply being observers, chroniclers, and interpreters of events (Lichter and Noyes, 1996), is still media-role-doctrine in most journalistic circles. The idea that journalists are simply neutral channels of information has, however, been challenged by the notion of journalists as active participants in nearly all forms of social interaction (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). Furthermore, this activist perspective on a problem-solving role for the media in society brings us to the media’s potential as platforms for negotiation, mediation and conciliation.

In her seminal study of news media roles, Douglas (1992) notes that media roles rarely indicate passivity, such as simply being interested bystanders or simply conduits of information. Her delineation of media roles define mostly active media roles, such as:

[being] party to the conflict, advocate, legitimator, mediator, arbitrator, agent, truth-seeker, agenda-setter, revolutionary, watchdog and guard dog. Some imply bias or interest in a particular direction—namely party to the conflict, advocate, legitimator, agent, agenda-setter, revolutionary, watchdog and guard dog. Others indicate some version of neutrality—for instance, interested bystander, mediator, arbitrator, truth-seeker (1992, p. 267).

More importantly, at least two of these roles—that of the media becoming mediators or arbitrators—implies that the media provide (or become) forums for the opposing parties to explain or discuss their positions. This, in turn, indicates how just about every form of journalism, but especially radio and television debates, become forums where some or other form of negotiation occurs. Wolfsfeld (1997) echoes this idea by suggesting that the news media have become the central arena in which major conflicts are played out. This notion presupposes some kind of competition for a space in the media forum (or arena) and a competitive debate via the news media over contradicting positions.

This phenomenon is visible in the way that parties in conflict or opponents on a range of societal matters, are increasingly using public affairs media platforms to “air” their differences, and in a sense to directly and publicly negotiate with each other. Having established such a form of communication, media moderators such as *Nightline*’s Ted Koppel has, by putting the parties in direct contact, provided them with a form of, what Burton (1969, p. 61) terms, “controlled communication.” Moreover, Kelman’s description of the complementary role that interactive problem solving can play during all stages of a negotiation process, also fits the role that public affairs programs such as *Nightline* can play, albeit in a public, and not a behind-the-scenes manner: “In the prenegotiation phase, they can help create a political atmosphere conducive to movement to the table; in the active negotiation phase, ...and in the postnegotiation phase, they

can contribute to implementation of the negotiated agreement and to long-term peacebuilding (Kelman, 1996, p. 502). Like problem solving workshops, and other forms of interactive conflict resolution (see Fisher, 1997; Rothman, 1997), it is the non-binding nature of media debates that allow for their potential unique contribution to the larger negotiation process. Unlike most interactive conflict resolution models, however, media debates are public, and therefore, the participants always run the risk of seeing the conflict becoming more polarized due to highly adversarial statements made not only in public, but also to a large viewing audience.

Public affairs programs with debate formats, such as *Nightline*, provide an appropriate example of unofficial media intervention in inter-group conflict, and to an extent even a form of mediation between the groups in conflict. The source of this phenomenon, as Merrill (1989, pp. 10-11) contends, is the basic journalistic process of reporting on both sides of an issue, or interviewing both sides of a conflict, together or apart, that results in "a reconciliation, a hybridization, a mediation--a dialectical synthesis..."

As such, our understanding of the media, and especially television's role as a forum for negotiation has evolved over the past 25 years. In 1974, Davison gave this description of the mass media's roles in international conflict resolution:

The media could increase the quantity and quality of the information that leaders and publics in each nation have about other nations; they could provide early warning of dangerous situations and could point out opportunities for strengthening international understanding; they could encourage the use of negotiation, mediation, and other mechanisms for conflict resolution, and facilitate the work of negotiators and mediators; they could help to bring about states of mind in which peaceful solutions would be more readily sought and accepted; and they could play a part in the mobilization and encouragement of individuals and organizations seeking to strengthen international understanding (pp. 6-7).

According to this demarcation, the media are merely responsible for drawing attention to the role of negotiators and mediators, and not so much being third parties themselves or for directly contributing to the resolution of conflict by providing a public forum. Other than stimulating the use of mechanisms for conflict resolution, such as negotiation, mediation, and arbitration, the major task this pioneer of the role of the mass media in conflict resolution attributed to journalists was to "mobilize, or help establish contacts among those who are interested in finding peaceful solutions, and to help build public opinion favoring such solutions" (p. 26). Today, however, there is clearly a larger recognition that the media, and maybe especially electronic media such as radio and television, often provide public spaces where parties in conflict participate in a form of negotiation that may or may not contribute to a resolution of their differences.

Background to the Research

This research followed Arno's (1984) suggestion that there is a need for a form of media analysis that is parallel to methods of analysis in third-party intervention. It attempted to operationalize Arno's basic assumption that the most satisfactory answers concerning the media's role in conflict resolution will probably be found through exploring the nature of the news media's third-party intervention role.

Television public affairs programs such as *Nightline*, have in the past been highly effective at bringing parties in conflict together, at times being even more successful than formal national or international third parties or intervenors in this endeavor. *Nightline* has therefore become particularly significant as research material to examine media third-party roles in conflict resolution. As a television innovation, its public affairs format has become an acceptable forum for national and international parties in conflict to face each other, while anchorman Ted Koppel performs a role seemingly comparable to that of the 'neutral' third-party facilitator or mediator. The program, therefore offers social scientists a laboratory for research on 'media diplomacy', 'media mediation,' media tasks and roles, and even intervention ethics. In comparing and contrasting the media's third-party intervention with more conventional third parties (Botes, 1997), the main questions for research in this area became:

- 1) To what extent do television public affairs moderators perform third-party roles in bringing conflicting parties together on television?
- 2) How do television third-party roles differ from those of conventional third-party intervenors?

To start addressing these primary research questions, data were gathered mainly through a content analysis of *Nightline* broadcasts² from South Africa and Israel, in 1985 (from March 18-22) and 1988 (from April 25-29), respectively. The programs aired nightly in the U.S. for approximately one week each. (Edited versions of these broadcasts appeared a day or two later in South Africa, and, in part, more than a week later in Israel.) This provided 10 broadcasts in total from Israel and South Africa. Two different formats were used in Israel: the anchor interviewing the opposing parties in person or by satellite, and the more elaborate town meeting format which involved numerous disputants on either side of a conflict, as well as an audience of supporters for both sides. In South Africa only the interview format was utilized—Koppel with one or both of the opposing sides.

There are various reasons why *Nightline* became an obvious and appropriate choice for this research. Ted Koppel's widely acclaimed interviewing skills, as well as *Nightline's* reputation as the most innovative of public affairs television programs, provided the justification for using these series of programs for research on aspects of the relationship between conflict and the media. There are also obvious comparisons to be made between the two cases. The two series of programs were both initiated during heightened periods of conflict. In 1985, South Africa experienced civil unrest following the formation of the tri-cameral parliament that excluded blacks from political power. Similarly, in December 1987, the Israeli-occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank orchestrated the "intifada," a stone-throwing uprising of the Palestinian youth, has also been noted before. In preparing for the *Nightlines* from Israel "Koppel and Kaplan realized they had found 'South Africa II' "(Koppel and Gibson 1996: 98). Because they contained similar (but also ways also different) interview settings, the two program series form a unit on the one hand, and on the other, provide a cross-case analysis.

During the broadcasts from South Africa in 1985 the African National Congress (ANC) as the out-party, or out of power party (see Laue 1987), was mainly represented by Bishop Desmond Tutu as the unofficial spokesperson for black South Africans in the absence of the then still jailed Nelson Mandela. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), as the out-party during the town hall broadcasts from Israel in 1988, was represented by a number of prominent Palestinians with the blessing of PLO leader Yasser Arafat. They were Hanan Ashrawi, a university professor and spokesperson for the Palestinian people and leadership in the Occupied Territories (Ashrawi, 1995), Saeb Erakat, a then journalist and university professor, and Haider Abdul Shafi, a physician and founding father of the PLO (Koppel and Gibson, 1996). A fourth Palestinian panelist, the physician Mamdou al-Akhar, withdrew, seemingly because he deemed the political risks in participating too high.

The in-parties were essentially the governments in each case, the Likud government in Israel under Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and the white government of South Africa led by President P.W. Botha. However, the town hall programs in Israel featured a range of political perspectives in Israel: the Labor party member of the Knesset, Haim Ramon; Ehud Olmert, and Eliahu Ben-Elissar, senior members of the Likud party; and Dedi Zucker, a Knesset member for Citizens Rights who was also a founding member of the Peace Now movement. Because the program format in the South Africa broadcasts did not include a town hall meeting, the main feature of the program in South Africa under discussion here is the Tutu/Botha debate where the South African government was represented by Foreign Minister Pik Botha. In the course of the two week long broadcasts from each country a number of other prominent members of both societies were interviewed.

Research Methodology

To be able to compare the behavior of media moderators with institutional (formal) third parties such as mediators, one first needs to address another issue: What are the strategies, tactics, and techniques (or overall roles) of third-party intervenors? The literature in this regard offers no easy answers. The approaches to documenting and describing mediator behavior have ranged from taxonomies of general mediator strategies to more focused listings of isolated behavior (Jones, 1989). Most of these classifications (see Jones, 1989; Kochan and Jick, 1978; Kressel and Deutsch, 1977) appear to be variations on Simkin's (1971) outline of mediator strategies: *communication tactics*, *substantive tactics* and *procedural tactics*. *Communication tactics* are process oriented, and assist the parties with mutual information gathering and clarifying each other's views. *Substantive tactics* relate more to the issues in dispute such as cost-benefit analysis, "reality checks," and making suggestions about possible solutions. Thirdly, *procedural tactics* are purely process-oriented such as laying the ground rules for the format, the sequencing of meetings and developing an agenda.

Jones' (1989) three third-party strategies—*communication-facilitation*, *substantive-directive*, and *procedural*—outline categories were more relevant to be utilized for a media comparison. For example, *communication-facilitation* strategies, comprising of tactics such as *search for information* (i.e., defining the dispute, clarifying, paraphrasing and summarizing), *supportive communication* (i.e., explaining impartially and expressing empathy) and *instruction* (i.e., explaining ground rules), seem comparable to the actions of media moderators. These conflict analysis skills are clearly also the tools of the media intervenor's trade, and hence, begs a comparison.

Substantive-directive strategies and its four tactics—*discussing solutions, pressuring, power balancing* and *formalizing agreement*—bring us into the realm of actual conflict resolution activities. Most journalists, including television moderators, would argue fervently that they are not part of the decision making process of any dispute or its resolution. However, the premise of this research is that many forms of journalism are involved in this process, not so much by design, but by default. Merely by exposing outside parties such as the African National Congress and the Palestinian Liberation Organization as full, and therefore equal, participants on *Nightline*, the power balance between them and their interlocutors, the South African and Israeli governments respectively, might be swayed. Nearly all forms of journalism about social conflict, from daily print stories to radio and television interviews with one or more sides of the conflict, inquire about possible solutions and the formalizing of agreements, whereby, like mediators, they potentially influence the process of change. Challenging people's positions on an array of issues, is therefore a fairly acceptable journalistic practice. And finally, most of the formal mediator's *procedural* strategies, such as *agenda setting, the use of caucuses* (or interviewing parties separately), as well as generally *controlling the environment* are also normal activities for television moderators.

For the purpose of the content analysis, Wall's (1981) and Wall and Lynn's (1993) approximately 100 mediator techniques, most of which are applied to the *inter-negotiator relationship*, were used as the basis of the coding scheme. Among many other elements this includes *setting up the negotiations, establishing a protocol for negotiation, and controlling the inter-negotiator relationship* (i.e., *regulating the communication, clarifying perceptions, striking a balance between power positions and offering proposals*).

Moderator Ted Koppel's actions—statements, questions, and expressions—were the units of analysis. For example, questions and statements that served to draw out information (who, what, when, where, why, how) and viewpoints from the participants in a non-threatening, non-critical manner, were deemed *clarifying questions* and labeled as manifest/overt/explicit moderator tactics. In other words, Koppel's statements (or actions) were coded as tactics or roles (such as being a *clarifying question*), with respect to the effects they have or the functions they serve. From this analysis emerged a taxonomy of Koppel's tactics and strategies that blended some journalistic techniques with some third party (that is conflict resolution) type strategies.

To illustrate, let us examine two questions asked by Koppel, one from each series of programs—one in South Africa and one in Israel. First, the reference notation system for excerpts should be explained. The reference begins with either "SA" for South Africa or "IS" for Israel; followed by a number indicating the date; and finally a page number from the transcript for that date. For example, the first question below comes from the week of broadcasts in South Africa, specifically April 18, and page 11 of the transcript. The notation is therefore SA-18-11.

An example of the methodology is as follows:

- (1) One first locates a sample of Koppel's interactions with the parties, such as, "When you speak of that goal, Bishop... are you talking about one man, one vote...? (SA-18-11) or, to take an example from the Israel broadcasts, "You, I take it, would consider that a fairly reasonable, representative report, or in fact have we not shown all that there is to show?" (IS-26-4).
- (2) Each of these can then be described as simply a clarifying question.
- (3) Because the tactic is quite clear from the words spoken, it can be labeled as manifest/overt/explicit (as opposed to implicit or latent).

- (4) After completing steps one through three for the whole program, one looks for tactics that seem to cluster naturally with this, such as asking for information and explanation, and paraphrasing and summarizing the issues.
- (5) This cluster of tactics seems to serve the broader strategy of eliciting information and communication from the participants.
- (6) This tactic is common to both third parties and media moderators.

Here is another example of this analytical process:

- (1) Koppel asks, "Mr. Krause, is the policy of apartheid justifiable on moral and religious grounds, do you think?" (SA-21-5), or, for a similar example from the Israel broadcasts, "Mr. Olmert, it's one thing to talk about the military buying time for the political leaders. You're one of the political leaders. What are they buying time for? What are you fellows doing?" (IS-26-7).
- (2) In contrast to the earlier examples, these serve not just to elicit information but to confront or challenge. Therefore, they can be described as challenging questions.
- (3) Again, the tactic can be linked to actual words spoken (text on the transcript), so it is labeled as manifest/overt/explicit.
- (4) Again, this tactic clusters well with others, in this case, making challenging statements and playing parties off against each other.
- (5) This cluster seems to serve the strategy of pressuring or pushing the participants forward.
- (6) This tactic is very conventional to media moderators. It is also used by many third-party intervenors, depending on style and personal approach.

Table 1, *The Television Moderator's Manifest Tactics and Their Frequency*, lists all the manifest tactics identified in the two week long series of *Nightline* broadcasts—the moderator's statements and actions. The numerical columns indicate frequency of use, first in the South Africa series, then in the Israel series. These manifest tactics are organized in descending order of overall frequency of use.

A few initial caveats must also be issued concerning the data and how they should be interpreted. First, in Table 1, every tactic is assigned two numbers indicating how often Koppel used it: first in the South Africa series, then in the Israel series. There is some inherent subjectivity in determining what exact statements and questions of the moderator fit those tactics. For example, the interpretive lines between *clarifying questions*, *challenging questions*, and *reality checking* were, inevitably at times, fairly indistinct. This kind of content analysis of text is not an exact science. In spite of this fact, the numerical counts do give some sense of the frequency with which a particular tactic was used, but not necessarily an exact or indisputable one. This method fits what Robson (1993, p. 402) calls "quasi-statistics," which is the result of having "data which, while in principle numerical, cannot be precisely quantified." However, the actual numbers from the content analysis do provide specific markers and behavioral indicators. At the same time, the presence or absence of a particular tactic is as important as how frequently it was used.

TABLE 1: The Television Moderator's Manifest Tactics and their Frequency	South Africa	Israel
Ask challenging question	33	25
Ask clarifying question	30	17
Control turn-taking/air time	22	21
Introduce & describe participants	7	9
Make challenging statement	7	8
Stroke the participant	6	8
Orient parties toward future	8	5
Validate a party's point of view (including via background pieces)	3	10
Elicit viewpoint/position	3	10
Play parties off against each other	7	5
Ask for information & explanation	8	3
Repeat challenging question	4	4
Reality-check	3	5
Warn "in-party" of consequences of their behavior	2	6
Use hypothetical "what if" questions	1	7
Paraphrase/summarize the issue	4	3
Use humor to reduce tension	1	6
Express optimism about future cooperation	4	2
Describe & explain the process	1	5
Point out shared position	1	3
Express intent to be neutral	0	4
Provide face-saving	0	4
Minimize venting, history telling	0	4
Determine/establish "real" stake-holders	3	0
Emphasize parties' opposing positions	2	1
Contradict/debate participants	2	1
Ask for background/explanation	1	2
Present party with mirror image of itself	0	3
Accept blame for procedural problems	0	3
Allow participants to set substantive agenda	0	3
Attempt to extract a concession	2	0
Explain terminology to viewers	2	0
Encourage nonviolent negotiation	1	1
Empathize with emotion	1	1
Repeat statements from previous show for continuity and entertainment	1	1

TABLE 1: The Television Moderator's Manifest Tactics and their Frequency	South Africa	Israel
Empathize with suffering on both sides	0	2
Inquire about outside pressures	1	0
Determine alliances among out-parties	1	0
Elicit options for change	1	0
Promote use of other third parties	1	0
Seek areas of agreement	1	0
Ask participants to stay focused on the issue	1	0
Appeal for civility	0	1
Explain program's journalistic role	0	1
Appeal for real dialogue	0	1
Point out benefits of participating in media process	0	1
Verify accuracy of background piece	0	1

In contrast to the examples of the media moderator's manifest third party tactics in Table 1 (tactics that were deduced directly from Koppel's spoken words), a different set of third party roles that are inherent to all third parties were inferred or implicitly deduced from the context. The following lengthy excerpt from the South Africa programs embodies several of these latent roles: *bestowing credibility* to participants, *empowering/equalizing parties* by bringing them together, *providing direct communication*, and *legitimizing the participants* at the (electronic) 'table':

...In a moment, Bishop Tutu will be joining us from the office of his other church here in Johannesburg. And we will also be joined by South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha, who is in Cape Town. But first, a brief look at both these men.

[voice-over] Last year, Bishop Desmond Tutu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in leading the nonviolent campaign against apartheid. But this first black Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg seems a most unlikely leader of a moral crusade. There is about Bishop Tutu so much bubbling enthusiasm, such a buoyant optimism, that it's easy to forget that this man is walking a political tightrope from which he could tumble at any moment. Bishop Tutu, for example, is widely thought to support the policy of disinvestment, which is, encouraging mostly American businesses to pull out of South Africa as a moral gesture against apartheid. But were he to openly support disinvestment, Bishop Tutu would face up to five years in prison. The Bishop joins us from the study of his church in Johannesburg.

The foreign minister of South Africa is almost universally known in this country as Pik Botha. The "Pik" is an abbreviation of the Afrikaans word for penguin. But as his adversaries have discovered, this is no man to be taken lightly. He is one of the most popular politicians in South Africa. A former

ambassador to the United Nations, he has always been an eloquent spokesman for his government, charming, a brilliant debater, and some say an excellent actor when necessary. Pik Botha is also said to have an explosive temper. Since 1980 he has been both minister of foreign affairs and information, sort of a combination between George Shultz and Larry Speakes. Foreign Minister Botha joins us from Cape Town, South Africa.

*[on camera]*Gentlemen, I'm very much appreciative that both of you could join us this evening. Mr. Foreign Minister, it makes sense, since you are a senior member of this government, that we would invite you. Let me explain to you why we have invited Bishop Tutu. As you well know, in the eyes of many people outside South Africa, Bishop Tutu is perhaps the best-known spokesman for the disenfranchised in this country.... (SA-18-5)

In terms of manifest (overt) tactics, Koppel is simply introducing and describing the participants. However, he is implicitly doing much more. From an earlier part of the transcript, we know that these two men had never debated each other directly on television or in person. Given that the overwhelming political power in South Africa at the time of the broadcast was in the hands of the white apartheid government, out-party representatives were generally not given this level of exposure on television, and the negotiating process itself did not start until much later. By presenting the prominent anti-apartheid bishop and the government minister in an equal manner, and by describing the bishop in favorable terms, Koppel and *Nightline* are clearly, intentionally or unintentionally, empowering the out-party.

These latent—or deduced—roles address questions regarding the effect that media third party intervention has on the parties or the negotiation process and that is not the focus of this paper. Here we are mainly concerned with the moderator's third party tactics and the extent to which they conform to conventional third parties such as mediators. In analyzing the data from Table 1, the notations in the discussion below, as before, refer to South Africa (SA) or Israel (IS) followed by numbers that denote the date of the broadcast and the page number of the transcript respectively.

The Media Moderator and Third Party Tactics: A Discussion

In analyzing the manifest tactics of television moderators there was a constant danger of reading too much into the text—making assumptions about the moderator's intent, rather than just evaluating the manifest or spoken words. The speaker or media moderator's intent, however, can often also be deduced not only from the spoken words but also from the person's body language and voice inflection. This was an important reason why the analysis of these transcripts was done while simultaneously looking at the videotapes. Two instances of interactions that Ted Koppel had with the participants during the town meeting in Israel illustrate the problem:

...Mr. Olmert, it's one thing to talk about the military buying time for the political leaders. You're one of the political leaders. What are you buying time for? What are you fellows doing? [IS-26-7]

and,

But just based on the reality of where we are now, I'm not sure that the Arab world will be enthralled by King Hussein entering into these negotiations, and King

Hussein made it clear as recently as this past Sunday that he's not prepared to represent the Palestinians. So what is that about? [IS-26-18]

While the context of this interaction as well as the speaker's inflection and body language all assist in the interpretation of the tactic, it does not provide a clear picture of the speaker's intent. Koppel's questions in the first example ["*What are you buying time for? What are you fellows doing?*"] can be interpreted as merely asking for information or, within the context of the sentence, can also be seen as being more than that, namely a *challenging* question. Similarly, did he mean the question in the second example, "*So what is that about?*," to be simply clarifying of the situation, or was he indeed challenging the previous speaker's (Mr. Olmert's) argument that it is not possible to negotiate with the Palestinians without the presence of Jordan? Depending on the tactic-evaluator's reading of the emotive nature of the situation, this question could be deemed either as *clarifying*, *challenging*, or even *reality checking*. That there is a distinction to be made between *clarifying* and *challenging* questions, however troublesome this might prove to be because of different interpretations of context and intent, becomes very important in comparing Koppel's third-party style in the South Africa programs versus the programs in Israel/Palestine.

Another media moderator tactic that stands out is the use of *face-saving*. *Face-saving* is clearly not a conventional journalistic role but it becomes conventional in the way Koppel uses it. Although this tactic is only used four times throughout the ten programs and all four times in the town meeting show in Israel, it plays out in a variety of ways. The fence between the Israelis and Palestinians allowed both groups to pretend that they are separated from each other, saving face with their constituents. This *face-saving* device also allowed them to pretend they are communicating directly, and only with the moderator, while ultimately they would respond to each other's arguments and points of view. At the same time, however, it provided the conservative Israeli politicians on the program, specifically Ehud Olmert and Ben-Elissar, tools to heckle the Palestinians with. The Palestinians managed to ignore these mocking statements because Koppel assisted them in saving face by responding on their behalf:

[Ben-Elissar:] First of all, why don't you remove this fence? We don't need this fence! Who needs this fence?

[Koppel:] The Palestinians need this fence.

[Ben-Elissar:] They need it. I know that maybe they need it. We don't need it. I don't need it. The Israelis don't need this fence. If there is one thing that is sure that is definitive, it is that in this country Arabs and Jews will have to live together. Precisely as they will have to live forever--together in the Middle East. There is no other choice. So we don't need this fence.

[Koppel:] They are here at our invitation. [IS-26-5]

Other than this conventional form of *face-saving*, a program such as *Nightline* can also provide electronic *face-saving*. When parties are legally banned from meeting together, as has been the case at times in both South Africa and Israel, or when or when one or the other refuse to appear in the same room, satellite technology can bring them into the same 'electronic room' or onto the same screen. This allows them to communicate via the moderator, or directly with the moderator, while saving face by not being in the same location.

These examples of *face-saving*, though few in number, took various forms and their presence were very important in comparing moderator and mediator third-party roles. *Face-*

saving is a highly sophisticated mediator technique and its presence as a media moderator tactic, is therefore significant in comparing the behavior of these two professional types. Koppel did more *face-saving* for the Palestinians when he explained that one of their panelists, Dr. Mamdou al-Akhar, "has the flu" [IS-26-4], when in all probability he had political "stage fright" and decided he did not want to participate in this forum (Koppel and Gibson, 1986, p. 108).

This particular example of *face-saving* also underscores the fact that the television moderator has similar getting-to-the-table difficulties as conventional third parties do. Both participants and disputants who have agreed to join some kind of problem solving forum may for a variety of reasons, decide to withdraw at the last minute. In both South Africa and in Israel the producers had enormous problems in putting together panels of participants for their electronic table. Even before getting to that point, they had to negotiate with the two governments in question about entering into the major social conflict of each of these countries, as well as negotiate the cooperation of the out-party leadership, the ANC, and the PLO.

In South Africa, the ABC producers made the naive assumption that often gets inexperienced third parties into trouble, namely that at least the out-party would welcome their presence. As producer Tara Sonenshine later noted: "We got caught in what was then still a lot of division in the ANC between the far left and the middle. We went through elaborate negotiations to try to get the ANC on board this thing (Koppel and Gibson, 1996, p. 72). *Nightline*'s producers had similar problems in Israel. PLO chairman Arafat accepted Koppel's written explanation that "we [*Nightline*] were hoping for the first time to present the Palestinian point of view, without editing, and to present it on equal footing with the Israelis" (Koppel and Gibson, 1996, pp. 100-101). However, putting together credible representative panels became a nearly insurmountable problem (much of which was finally only managed because the producers agreed to the studio "wall" that symbolically separated the parties).

In both South Africa and Israel the out-party organizations (the ANC and the PLO) were banned, and their leaders jailed or in exile. Moreover, in Israel, because of the election in that year, Israeli politicians feared that participation in "any kind of dialogue might result in retribution at the polls" (Koppel and Gibson, 1996, p. 102). While Palestinian leaders such as Haider Abdul-Shafi and Hanan Ashrawi shared the conviction "that it was time to challenge the Israeli government in a public forum" (Koppel and Gibson, p. 1996: 103), they had historical, political and personal reasons for not wanting to be seen with certain Israelis. They therefore wanted to have some control over who were going to represent their side.

Koppel also realized in South Africa that their intervention might have unintended consequences: "He worried over the show's possible political impact. Might it make a bad situation worse?" (Koppel and Gibson, 1996, p. 73). In Israel, after Koppel and ABC News president Roone Arledge had breakfast with the then Israeli defense Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, Arledge still feared on the morning of the broadcast that Rabin's conclusion that they were "nuts" to attempt this television forum would come true:

...not only could there be violence, and there could be people killed, maybe, but on top of that we would be the cause of it all. If something bad happened, it would not only be a terrible event, but it would be indefensible that we went ahead, particularly if people found out that Rabin told us that we were crazy (Koppel and Gibson, 1996, p. 96).

The town meeting in the Jerusalem Theater finally went peacefully ahead after various panels of participants were rejected by both sides. However, this history of events not only illustrates how getting-to-the-table issues are shared by television moderators and conventional

third parties, but it also points to the physical and other dangers these professionals share during their different forms of intervening in national or international conflict.

From the initial manifest set of moderator tactics (Table 1), it is also interesting to note that Koppel performed other roles that are not conventional for journalists such as *encouraging peacemaking (or non-violent negotiation)*. In general, the format of interviewing two or more sides of a conflict simultaneously seems to produce a wider range of journalistic tactics and roles than does the ordinary journalistic format of interviewing just one party at a time. This format leads to a wide range of moderator tasks that are normally not enacted such as *introducing and describing participants, describing and explaining the process, and verifying the accuracy of the (journalistic) background pieces*.

Some Core Findings on the Media Moderator Strategies and Tactics

Beyond *clarifying* and *challenging* questions, the television moderator's most commonly used tactics seemingly are procedural in nature. In an effort to be fair and neutral to all the participants, Koppel controlled who spoke when and about what topic. This type of third-party control seems to be much more rigid than the initial fairly unrestricted approach of conventional mediators. This is especially true in the town meeting [IS-26] where Koppel did not only control which side spoke to a particular point but, even which specific individual would address it. So while both conventional and television third parties utilize this tactic, they seem to operationalize it very differently. In contrast to this, a further procedural tactic, *minimizing venting and history telling* is used fairly similarly. Both types of third parties seem to want to keep it to a minimum in the interest of time and in trying to get the parties to focus on the future and not the past.

What is clear from Table 1 is that *gaining information* in various forms and *facilitating the communication* between the parties are the main tactics of the television moderator, albeit sometimes in a fairly challenging manner. This is vividly illustrated by the high frequency of tactics that elicit communication such as asking *clarifying questions, eliciting viewpoints/positions, and asking for information and explanation*. In addition, the pressurizing tactic that is highest in number, *asking a challenging question*, while different in nature, can also be viewed as a form of eliciting information. What is also notable from the frequency count is that the television moderator makes use of a number of other important conventional mediator tactics, although they are far fewer in number. Among them are *orienting the parties towards the future, stroking the participants, validating the parties' point of view, using humor to reduce tension, and expressing the intent to be neutral*.

The internal logic of these findings in Table 1, especially in the tactics that appeared with the highest frequency, is related to the way in which the media moderator (Koppel) performed roles that are very similar to that of a traditional mediator, yet with a distinctly journalistic flavor. Like a traditional mediator he started out with ground rules, he then proceeded with a number of *clarifying questions* within which the parties stated their positions and interests while he found ways to *control their turn-taking and air time* in an ongoing fashion. However, Koppel's most often used manifest tactic was to *ask challenging questions*, a technique he used very early on in the process of moderating these normally 90 minute long *Nightline* programs. This is somewhat different from a traditional mediator who would normally resort to the use of such a tactic much later in an intervention process. The journalistic nature of the media moderator is also evidenced by the relatively high amount of times that Koppel *played the parties off against each other, and made challenging statements*. In each of the program series

he even contradicted and to a degree debated the participants on some points, which traditional mediators would rarely do. While traditional mediators do reality testing with the parties it is normally done in a more indirect and less confrontation manner.

In essence, however, the three most manifest tactics of the media moderator—to *ask challenging questions*, and to *ask clarifying questions* mediator while keeping *control of turn taking and air-time*—coincide with most frequently utilized techniques of a traditional mediator. In an effort to be fair and neutral to all the participants, and obviously to make maximum use of the program's limited airtime, Koppel controlled who spoke when about what topic. This type of third-party control seems to be much more rigid than the initial fairly unrestricted approach of conventional mediators. This is especially true in the town meeting [IS-26] where Koppel did not only control which side spoke to a particular point but also which specific individual would address it. So while both conventional and television third parties utilize this tactic, they seem to operationalize it very differently. In contrast to this, a further procedural tactic, *minimizing venting and history telling* is used fairly similarly. Both types of third parties seem to want to keep it to a minimum in the interest of time and in trying to get the parties to focus on the future and not the past.

During these broadcasts, Koppel exhibited many of the strategies and skills that third parties use, and did so quite adeptly. He *stroked the participants* when needed, *provided face-saving* when needed, *used hypothetical what-if questions*, *oriented the parties' towards the future*, and even *expressed optimism about their future cooperation*. His skill as a moderator was clearly in evidence when he made challenging statements. He often prefaced a confrontational question or statement with a softener, such as "I must tell you..." (IS-29-3) or a flattering comment, referring to participants as "intelligent," "sophisticated," or "experienced" (IS-28-4). In one instance during the town meeting in Israel, he adroitly reframed the main conflict issue in such a way that it could be seen as a mutual issue, one that both parties could say was their own:

This business of recognition, it is mutual, it has become the Gordian knot of Israeli-Palestinian relations. They [the Palestinians] say to you [the Israelis], recognize our leadership, recognize our right to sovereignty. You say to them, recognize our right to exist, recognize that we have a right to secure borders.... (IS-26-9).

This example of the television moderator's facilitation skills, raises the question of whether such third-party techniques, while performed in a journalistic setting, will also have other mediatory effects. These techniques and tactics of the television moderator are in nature so similar to that of a conventional third-party that even if neither of the parties (participants) saw their appearance on television as a problem solving exercise, it is quite feasible that it can have such an outcome. The opposite is also quite possible: if parties use this forum to publicly display their mutual dislike and distrust of each other, the result might be a deepening of the conflict, especially if the moderator is not adept at facilitating highly adversarial debates. The third-party skills of the moderator therefore becomes crucial to whatever consequences television debates might have, other than educating the public and each other on their positions and views. One way in which Koppel's media moderating role contributed to the larger negotiation processes in both cases was in the fact that he promoted the use of third parties during the South Africa programs, and appealed for a real dialogue during the Israel programs. Moreover, in spite of Koppel's protestations to the contrary during these programs, based on this list of his mediatory tactics he appears to be facilitating a negotiation between the parties on his programs.

The list of manifest tactics in Tables 1 illustrate the *extent to which television public affairs moderators perform third-party strategies and tactics in bringing conflicting parties together on television and also how these moderators perform in ways that are different compared to conventional third-party intervenors*. The data indicate that Koppel clearly performed traditional third party roles as a part of a media debate format that has a strong resemblance to the structure of mediatory intervention processes. Although he enacted these third roles in many ways similar to that of the traditional mediator, they differ in nature as well as in style.

These differences in the tactics of the media moderator pertain mostly to the fact that his is a mainly journalistic task. What is therefore clear from Table 1 is that *gaining information* in various forms and *facilitating the communication* between the parties are the main tactics of the television moderator. This is vividly illustrated by the high frequency of tactics that elicit communication such as asking *clarifying questions*, *eliciting viewpoints/positions*, and *asking for information and explanation*. In addition, the pressurizing tactic that is highest in number, *asking a challenging question*, while different in nature, can also be viewed as a form of eliciting information. What is also notable from the frequency count is that the television moderator makes use of a number of other important conventional mediator tactics, although they are far fewer in number. Among them are *orienting the parties towards the future*, *stroking the participants*, *validating the parties' point of view*, *using humor to reduce tension*, and *expressing the intent to be neutral*.

Journalism mythology, or how journalists view their role in society, also is a factor in the interpretation of some other unintended television moderator strategies, namely those that relate to *putting pressure on the parties*, *balancing power* and *empowering the parties*. While journalists on the whole declare these roles as beyond their scope of operation, these phenomena are unintended or spin-off effects of the journalistic task.

Media Debates as Potential Problem Solving Dialogues: A Conclusion

The contribution that television debates can make to resolving conflict is related directly to the degree to which the media third parties, or moderators, of such programs, transform adversarial debates on television into problem solving dialogues. While dialogues are supposed to “enhance safety and promote respectful exchange,” debates are often characterized by attacks and interruptions (Becker, et al., 1995, p.150). The *Nightline* case studies under discussion fell squarely into the debate category. They occurred in a competitive atmosphere in which the parties wanted to improve their positions at the expense of the other, rather than using the programs cooperatively, “as a device for promoting problem-solving toward mutually acceptable agreements” (Hopmann and Druckman, 1991, p. 282). Pre-meeting contacts between the parties who appeared on these programs in both Israel and South Africa were not possible because of the years of distrust and tension between them. In both cases, there was no guarantee that the parties would even address each other, in fact, in a number of cases, the participants insisted that they would only be on *Nightline* if they could speak to moderator Ted Koppel directly. While Koppel attempted to move the discussions (especially the town meeting in Israel) into a dialogue where parties attempt to analyze and problem solve, the participants inevitably reverted back to confrontational tactics.

According to Burton, third parties acting as catalysts and facilitators are responsible for transforming confrontational processes into problem solving exercises (Bercovitch, 1984).

However, while journalists, and especially media moderators, perform such roles in dealing with two sides of a conflict, they perform them relatively unconsciously and invariably without taking any responsibility for bringing the parties closer to any form of resolution. Because producers of public affairs programs do not always succeed in finding program participants who directly represent decision-makers, they often find, as Slim and Saunders (1995: 2) suggest for their sustained dialogues, “respected participants who reflect key viewpoints in their communities...” The problem, however, is that media dialogues, unlike interactive conflict resolution models (see Fisher, 1997; Rothman, 1992), are hardly ever sustained over months, and therefore become a form of media voyeurism that does not take any responsibility for its social intervention. If done correctly, and in more than just one week long program series, as was the case with *Nightline*'s interventions in both South Africa and Israel, media dialogues do have the potential to have many of the same roles as sustained dialogues: mapping the relationships, finding common ground, building future scenarios, and generating a will to change, which in this case, is also the public's will to change.

Another reason why media dialogues tend not to have social impact is that they approach conflict in the same way that most problem solving approaches do, by not challenging power relations and institutions and thereby becoming agents of the status quo. However, as can be illustrated from the case studies, media dialogues can in several ways be compared to other forms of conflict resolution in terms of their conflict transformation potential. Using Väyrynen's (1991, pp. 4-6) terminology in this regard, *Nightline*'s involvement in South Africa clearly assisted with “actor transformation,” by allowing for the emergence and legitimization of black activists against apartheid on South African and international television. In both Israel and South Africa, the out-parties argued that their participation on the *Nightline* programs made a qualitative difference in how they were perceived after that, and in the recognition that it gave them as spokespeople for a specific point of view. In that sense, because these programs treated all its participants as equals, they matched Väyrynen's definition of “structural transformation” by altering the distribution of power between the actors and by bringing about a qualitative change in their relationship. Just as many of the transformational outcomes of dialogue processes are unintended, most of the changes that occur in conflicts due to the interventions of the media were not intended by the media actors. However, most journalists and definitely media moderators understand that parties in conflict use them for their own interests in return for participating in such programs.

As Väyrynen points out, there were similarities between the Israeli-Palestinian and the South African conflicts of the mid to late '80s. Just as the United States and Israel refused to deal with the PLO and attempted to negotiate with the Arab states about the conflict, the South African government refused to negotiate with the ANC and instead attempted to circumvent the situation by dealing with the various ethnic homeland leaders. In both the *Nightline* series in Israel and in South Africa, while not being able to necessarily bring the leaders of the out-parties to the table, the programs showcased their internal representatives such as Hanan Ashrawi and Desmond Tutu respectively, and thereby legitimated them as the true out-parties to the conflict. By empowering the out-parties in this way in South Africa, and in Israel by giving the Palestinian side a hearing during the height of the intifada, *Nightline* “unintendedly,” to use Väyrynen's terminology, portrayed the ANC and the PLO on equal footing with the South African and Israeli governments, and thus became part of the conflict's transformation. The impact of the media in empowering out-parties, and thereby playing a transformational role, will

unquestionably be greater under circumstances of impoverished communication between the parties, as was evident in both case studies.

More importantly, the findings of this research pertaining to the number of similar media roles between media moderators and conventional mediators lend further credence to Arno's conceptualization of media actors as third parties in conflict. It has therefore, as Arno (1984, p. 238) contends, become essential for conflict analysts, as well as media researchers to "look at the media themselves as important actors in conflict situations at both the national and the international levels."

Endnotes

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² The transcripts of these programs were ordered from Journal Graphics, 1535 Grant Street, Denver, Colorado, 80203-1843.

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